

# Arts & Letters

## FILM

[“Up and Down” and “Head-On”]

### Camp of the Not so Sainly

By Steve Sailer

THE EUROPEAN establishment has long silenced discussion of immigration by demonizing restrictionists, such as the murdered Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, as racists. Last November's assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-born Muslim extremist, however, has finally made the topic central to European politics.

Immigration in Central Europe is explored in “Up and Down” and “Head-On,” two memorable movies with forgettable titles. While the high-velocity “Head-On,” a jolting love story about cocaine-sniffing young Turks, looks at assimilated immigrants in Hamburg, the more staid “Up and Down” examines the impact of new immigrants on native Czechs in Prague.

“Up and Down” is the kind of ensemble comedy-drama that appeals more to critics than audiences, who want star vehicles and happy endings. With a title recalling “Upstairs, Downstairs,” “Up and Down” deftly traces the unexpected intersection of a troubled upper-middle-class family out of a Milan Kundera novel about heroic dissidents with deplorable sexual morals and a lumpenproletariat network of illegal immigrant smugglers and skinhead soccer hooligans.

While lecturing on immigration, a professor—revered for his costly defiance of the old Warsaw bloc puppet regime—

collapses. When told he needs a potentially lethal operation, he announces to his teenage daughter and her beautiful mother that he wants to see his son, who hasn't written to him since emigrating to Australia, and to divorce his wife.

The abandoned wife learns that her husband won back in the post-Velvet Revolution courts the beautiful house the Communist Party threw them out of as punishment for his anti-Soviet activities and has been living in it with his mistress, while she has been stuck in a neighborhood recently overrun by thieving Gypsies. Normally a cheery soul popular in Prague's traditional beer halls, this woman scorned is outraged to hear that her husband's chic girlfriend works for a government agency that subsidizes the asylum-seekers who steal from her.

Meanwhile, a working-class wife with an Amélie haircut and an infertility problem is desperate for a baby, but her loving husband, a dim security guard played endearingly by Jirí Macháček, is ineligible to adopt because of his soccer riot assault conviction. So she buys a dark-skinned South Asian baby from two illegal alien traffickers, to the anguish of her harelip husband. He fears he'll be excommunicated by his quasi-fascist soccer-fan buddies, who worry that blue-collar lugs like themselves are being forced out by low-wage Asian newcomers. (As in “American History X,” in which Edward Norton plays an evil skinhead, the script gives the xenophobes most of the good lines.)

Soon, though, the big oaf is infatuated with his tiny brown son. Sure, the dumb brute with the heart of gold is a cliché, but that's because he's such an emotionally resonant archetype.

In Fatih Akin's funny and disturbing “Head-On,” a suicidally glum busboy at a Hamburg punk-rock bar, who has

almost forgotten his native Turkish, agrees to a fake, sexless marriage to a pretty but slutty Turkish girl. She needs a Turkish husband to move out of her patriarchal father's house so she can sleep around and take drugs.

“Head-On” begins as a raucous reworking of “The Odd Couple” as a punk romantic comedy. When the bride nicely redecorates her pseudo-groom's squalid apartment, replacing his Siouxsie and the Banshees poster with throw pillows, he snorts, “It looks like a chick-bomb exploded in here.” (Modern love stories need these kinds of plot contrivances to delay consummation.) But her *Carmen*-like promiscuity leads to tragedy and an impassioned coda in Istanbul.

Many pundits advocate assimilation as the sure cure for any problems caused by immigration, but few ask, “assimilation toward what?” In America, for example, immigrant kids often assimilate toward gangsta-rap norms. German culture, still despised and depressed 60 years after 1945, lacks the confidence in its own coolness that African-Americans possess, so Hamburg's hipsters, both German and Turkish, assimilate instead toward the decadent styles of the old London and New York punk scenes.

True believers in assimilation assume that young Turks educated in Germany will naturally want to write a new *Eroica* symphony or found the next Mercedes-Benz, but “Head-On” suggests that they actually want to re-enact “Sid and Nancy,” Alex Cox's 1986 classic about Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious and junkie-groupie Nancy Spungeon, the two most worthless people ever to fall madly in love. “Head-On” isn't quite as stunning as “Sid and Nancy,” but it's close. ■

Both are rated R for sex and violence.

# A Factually Correct Guide for Max Boot

By Thomas E. Woods Jr

MY BOOK *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* has received far more attention than I ever expected. Once the book hit number eight on the *New York Times* bestseller list, the *Times*' editorial page condemned it without actually showing where its arguments were mistaken; several weeks later, to my surprise, the *Times* published a favorable profile of me. The controversy surrounding the book has reached at least two other continents: Brazil's *Folha de S. Paulo*, with the highest circulation of any newspaper in Latin America, published a full interview with me, as did a major Catholic newspaper in Ireland. The *Times* of London, for its part, published a more or less positive piece about the book.

Among conservatives the reception has been mostly favorable: Pat Buchanan praised the book on the "McLaughlin Group," Gary Bauer called it one of the top five books of 2004, and positive reviews appeared in such outlets as *Human Events* and this magazine. But neoconservative attacks on the book have also begun to surface, the most recent of which was by Max Boot.

Boot's review appeared in the online version of the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*. Mind you, the print version of the *Weekly Standard* had already reviewed the book favorably. Reviewer James W. Haley Jr. said that my book "is ultimately about truth" and is one that "everyone interested in American history should have in his library." "It is not surprising," he observed, "that a history guide written by a professor with an undergraduate degree from Harvard and

a doctorate from Columbia made it onto the *New York Times* bestseller list. What is surprising—refreshingly so—is that a text that challenges the liberal canon has so resonated with the American public."

Max Boot didn't find it quite so refreshing. Having seen the book (erroneously) described in the *New York Times* as "a neocon retelling" of American history, he grew curious and got a copy. Boot is right about one thing: the description of my book as neocon was simply idiotic; distinctions like neoconservative and paleoconservative are typically lost on the *Times*.

What is so revealing about Boot's critique, though, and what in fact makes his review newsworthy, is that it conclusively proves what traditional conservatives have consistently alleged: neoconservatism, at root, is merely a variety of leftism. Boot's criticism of my work, in fact, is almost identical to that of the *New York Times*.

Early on, Boot explains, *The Politically Incorrect Guide* "starts to slip from conventional history into a Bizarro world where every state has the right to disregard any piece of federal legislation it doesn't like," a position its author derives "mainly the writings of the Southern pro-slavery politician John C. Calhoun." What my book actually says is that important early Americans held the view that the states could refuse to enforce unconstitutional federal legislation and that both

extent of its own powers, the states will wind up completely eclipsed as the federal government hands down rulings in its own favor. The states had to have some corporate mechanism for resisting federal usurpations if they were not to be absorbed by the federal government.

I understand why Boot, a neoconservative nationalist, wants to avoid letting people know that it was Jefferson who came up with this "Bizarro" idea, since most Americans have an abiding respect for Jefferson and might be inclined to give his ideas a fair hearing. Boot prefers instead to attribute the idea solely to the "pro-slavery" Calhoun in order to taint it with the brush of slavery and get back to the neoconservative business of defending federal supremacy.

Professor Kevin Gutzman has shown that the principles behind nullification had in fact been germinating for 10 years, developing from ideas and positions that were taken for granted at the Virginia ratifying convention even by the Federalists, who most favored political centralization. Boot's treatment of the subject reveals not the slightest acquaintance with any of this; my active imagination has simply invented some "Bizarro world" in which these ideas were taken seriously.

Boot then writes that I am "particularly upset about the 14th Amendment (he claims it was never lawfully ratified)

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North and South had recourse to this mechanism at one time or another during the 19th century. As for relying "mainly" on Calhoun, in an 11-page chapter on the subject my discussion of Calhoun amounts to half a page. My main source, in fact, is Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson's concern was this: if the federal government is allowed to have the final, authoritative word on the

because it barred former Confederates from holding political office." Read my Reconstruction chapter for yourself and consider the effort it must have taken Boot to misrepresent it this extent. My concern about the Fourteenth Amendment has nothing to do with its disqualification of former Confederates; I raise that issue in a single paragraph in order to show that a variety of reasons existed